

SENILIS CATHEDRAL IS NOT DESTROYED

Preservation Said To Be
Due to Germans' Poor
Marksmanship.

OLD FRENCH VILLAGE
BOMBARDED 4 HOURS

Brave Abbe Offers His Life That
His Beloved Town Might
Be Spared.

[From The Tribune Correspondent.]
London, Nov. 4.—The Cathedral of Senlis, one of the most beautiful of the minor examples of the ancient architecture of France, was not destroyed by the Germans, after all. It was not because they did not attempt it. On the contrary, they placed their guns on the hills at Chamant, three kilometers distant, and shelled the cathedral for four hours. They say that they purposely spared the cathedral, but it is impossible to deny the evidence that the town itself offers that every house destroyed by the German shells was in the direct line of fire from the guns to the cathedral. Some of the shells fell short and some passed beyond, and the only thing that can be said for the Germans is that none of their shells succeeded in striking the delicate, lace-like spire. That is, none of them succeeded in doing any material damage. Some of the beautiful decorations of the clock tower were broken and shattered, the arch supporting the clock was cracked, several pieces were knocked out of the balustrade at the base of the principal facade of the clock tower and one of the statues on this balustrade was knocked off and its fall broke a gargoy. But all of the damage was of a purely minor nature, and the cathedral can be restored with comparative ease. Despite this, however, the story of Senlis loses none of its tragic interest, and when this story is told in the simple language of the inhabitants of the village the tragedy is heightened by the very simplicity of the telling.

It is the story of what war does to a little country village, the most peaceful and peace loving. For that is what Senlis was—a peaceful, peace loving little village, not far from Paris, yet which the modernity of Paris had never reached, to enliven its rusticity and Old World simplicity. Lying almost concealed in a quiet valley, surrounded by low hills and a gracious, smiling country, the world had passed it by. It was one of those rare little villages that are satisfied to be of the life of the country, and the country had well repaid it, for in the springtime its old walls and ramparts were covered with a profusion of flowers and new beauty was added to its age.

A delightful picture of the little village is given by M. Robert de Lezeau, in "Le Figaro." "Yet," he says, "it remains a peaceful village, and though without boasting, it seemed to say: 'Evidently I have been chosen for great things: I have sheltered many grand seigneurs and grand dames as kings and queens themselves, who have chosen to repose among my flowers after their work and their pleasures. But I do not wish to speak too loudly of these memories. One might try to take them from me.' And so Senlis told her story, very discreetly, to the lovers of ancient things who loved her, and the tranquil and wise little city conserved a charm like that of a very old lady who yet retains the freshness of mind of her youth and has many pretty stories to tell her young friends."

It was 12:45 o'clock on September 2, while Senlis was bravely preparing for the German occupation, that the first shell burst at the corner of a street near the cathedral, and the pitiless bombardment continued until 4 o'clock. The archdeacon, standing on the terrace before the cathedral, begins the story of the German occupation. "It is by the road from Crepy-en-Valois that the Germans come," he says. "Immediately the major with several officers goes to the mairie, where he finds M. Odent, faithful to his perilous post, though overcome with sadness."

"M. Odent," interjects a villager, "was a brave man, but with nothing of arrogance. He would not hurt a fly on his own account. He was too good. If he had not been so good he would, perhaps, not have been killed by these bandits."

"M. Odent," the abbe resumes, "had not brought together the municipal council. He seemed to foresee his terrible fate and to prefer to meet it alone. The evening before he had sent his family away and remained himself to risk his life."

"The German major addressed him brutally."

"Are you the Mayor of Senlis?"

"Yes, I am."

"Can you guarantee that the inhabitants will not oppose the entrance of our troops and will not attack them in any way? Your life depends upon your good faith."

"Village Guaranteed Peaceful."

"Monsieur," replied M. Odent, "my village is peaceful. There will be no violence here, and you can be certain."

"But at that instant shots were heard in the outskirts. It was a battalion of Turcos, who were not willing to retire without a parting word. But the German major became purple with rage."

"What is that?" he cried. "It is an ambushade. There is firing from the houses. Very well. Your account is finished."

"But the abbe came to the rescue of his old friend and explained that the shots had been fired by regular troops."

"Yes," said the major, "and also by civilians. Moreover, Mr. Mayor, where are your notices? Where is your proclamation?"

"I have not made any."

"So, you acknowledge it. You have made no appeal to the citizens to remain calm."

"No, monsieur."

"Very well. You shall be shot."

Again the abbe intervened.

"My old friend," he said, "draw up at once the notice that they demand. I will carry it to the printer and we will have it in an hour."

"The Mayor agreed. And," added the abbe, "a few days later his body was found with a copy of the notice pinned to his coat."

The next step of the German commander was to seize a number of the inhabitants of Senlis as hostages. They

were chosen by chance—one because he was found in the sous-prefecture of police, another because he happened to be standing on his doorstep. M. Odent was, of course, the first. They were all taken to Chamant, where the German General Staff was quartered.

And here, on the report of the major that the Germans had been fired upon by civilians, the fate of Senlis was decided upon. The old abbe was the first to learn of it.

"A colonel was billeted on me," he says, "and my servant gave him all that he asked for. He seemed satisfied, and at first he did not seem a very bad sort. When I returned to my house I found him in the salon and he said to me:

"My father, I am sorry for you."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because to-morrow you will have no more country."

"How is that, monsieur?"

"To-morrow they will be nothing left of your village. It will be burned—destroyed. We intend to make of Senlis a new Louvain. It will be our French Louvain."

"I protested, despairingly."

"But it is not possible, monsieur. It would be a monstrous injustice."

"All the villages where we are fired on will meet the same fate."

"I supplicated him. I implored him. 'It does not depend on me, my father,' the colonel replied sadly."

"Then," I said, "do me one favor. Take me before your General Staff and let me plead the cause of my poor village. Convince your general of its innocence."

"My father," said the colonel, "have you reflected that you will be held as a hostage?"

"So be it, monsieur," I said. "Do not occupy yourself with me."

Perpetual Prayers Promised.

"Seek his permission for me and I will remain all day to-morrow in my house so that you can find me without trouble. You will have my prayers always if you will do this for me."

The next day I waited as I had agreed, but no one came for me, and I learned in the evening that the German General Staff had decided to be content with a partial destruction."

The brave old abbe told his story with all simplicity and modesty and had to be constantly urged to continue by a young priest who stood beside him.

"But, my father," M. de Lezeau said to him, "in offering yourself as a hostage you went to almost certain death."

"Oh, monsieur," replied the abbe, "it was a clock, and I had taken communion in the morning."

Some parts of Senlis were spared, but the Germans destroyed from top to bottom the Street of the Republic. It remains no more than a succession of calcined stones under piles of wreckage, with here and there a household utensil or a piece of cloth showing.

It was not the German shells which destroyed these houses, but incendiary bombs thrown by hand into the houses. When a door was found closed the Germans forced it open just far enough to place their bomb inside. The Palais de Justice and the little sous-prefecture of police, which date from the eighteenth century and which was so pretty that many a sous-prefect had refused promotion rather than leave it, were both left without one stone standing on another. The little railroad station, where the travellers who collected there all knew each other by name and were never too pressed for time to say good morning, was likewise left a heap of smoking ruins.

"Ah, monsieur," said one villager, "I saw them at their work. They went about it so seriously, with such order, without hurry or crowding. One would have said that they were working in their offices. Nothing was forgotten."

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